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FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER

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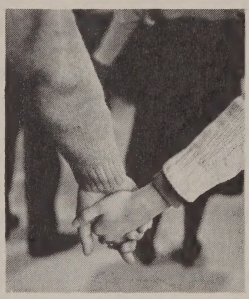
"It is not enough to lean upon those who would do our brain work for us. It is a matter where we must discern for ourselves the truth or falseness involved."

Carl A. Evans



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Since 1949 the purpose of Fellowship In Prayer is to promote the practice of prayer among all religious faiths whose fundamental belief is in God regardless of race, creed, or color, and whose tenets include the universal attributes of truth, honesty, justice, and mercy, that thereby there may arise a closer relation to Almighty God and a deeper spirit of fellowship among mankind.

Editorial:

Getting Specific

The practices of prayer are different for each of us. They are our direct individual encounters with the Infinite; with that unexpected, uncontrollable Reality beyond telling that surrounds and sustains us, with the one we call God.

We have a difficult time in talking about prayer even when we share theologies. There are several reasons for this. It is partly because prayer is among our most personal activities. It is partly because we discover prayer and learn to practice it in distinctly different ways. And it is partly because of the nature of the activity that we use the word prayer to describe.

In prayer we enter a world that is utterly independent of our ordinary human conventions and manipulations. Through prayer we open ourselves to experiences at the boundaries of ourselves. Prayer is our returning to our primary source of meaning and energy. The experiences that we have in prayer are the roots, the seeds, and the causes of our individual futures.

Prayer takes us to a world where things matter very clearly in and of themselves. We ask to be received as guests in the real world when we pray. Because it is difficult for us to reconcile the wonders we encounter there with our usual pracices and conceptions, we are understandably rather shy in discussing our experiences.

We experience a peculiar paradox in prayer. Our ordinary way of using words fails and our hidden assumptions, our pretensions, and the other devices of our daily lives – the aspects of ourselves and others that we rarely notice, assume an embarassing prominence.

We want and need to share our efforts to return to God, but our attempts to talk about them lead us almost invariably back through self-consciousness to a stuttering humbled silence.

In a recent conversation Trustee James Liu suggested a possibility that is likely to be of some use to us all, regardless of our theological differences. Namely, that we concentrate our efforts in these pages on the public and private practices which we use to pray.

Continued on page 14

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Please notify the Fellowship's office at 134 Franklin Corner Rd., Lawrenceville, New Jersey 08648 if you would like to receive future issues of the Fellowship In Prayer. This bi-monthly publication is available upon request at no charge. Readers are encouraged to contact us on matters of mutual interest. Contributions to the Fellowship are sincerely appreciated and tax deductible.

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Words of Wisdom

Most of our trouble lies in praying in such a manner as to attempt to effect a change in the unchangeable God. We ought to pray to such purpose as to effect changes in ourselves. Instead of attempting to put through long-distance calls to the remotest heavens, we ought to do more intra-communicating with the God who is "nigh unto us, in our mouth, in our heart, that we may be aware of Him."

Rabbi Nathan A. Perilman

To each among you
Have We prescribed a Law
And an Open Way.
If God had so willed,
He would have made you
A single People, but (His
Plan is) to test you in what
He hath given you: so strive
As in a race in all virtues.
The goal of you all is to God;
It is He that will show you
The truth of the matters
In which ye dispute;

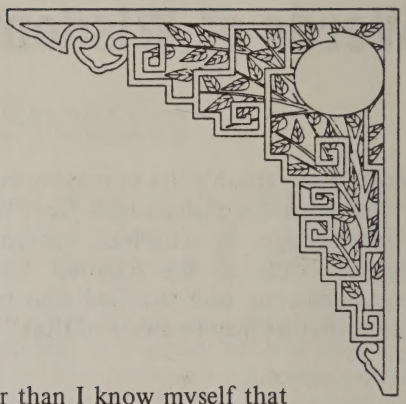
The Koran Sura 5-51

Subtle is the Lord, but malevolent He is not

Albert Einstein

You can't jump over your own knees.

Russian Proverb



Lord, Thou knowest better than I know myself that I am growing older, and will some day be old.

Keep me from getting talkative, and particularly from the fatal habit of thinking I must say something on every subject and on every occasion.

Release me from craving to try to straighten out everybody's affairs.

Make me thoughtful, but not moody; helpful, but not bossy. With my vast store of wisdom, it seems a pity not to use it all – but Thou knowest, Lord, that I want a few friends at the end.

Keep my mind free from the recital of endless details – give me wings to get to the point.

Seal my lips on my many aches and pains – they are increasing, and my love of rehearsing them is becoming sweeter as the years go by.

I ask for grace enough to listen to the tales of others' pains. Help me to endure them with patience.

Teach me the glorious lesson that occasionally it is possible that I may be mistaken.

Keep me reasonably sweet; I do not want to be a saint – some of them are so hard to live with, but a sour old woman is one of the crowning works of the devil.

Help me to extract all possible fun out of life. There are so many funny things around us, and I don't want to miss any of them. Amen.

– Written by a Mother Superior who prefers to remain anonymous

Letting it Happen

by Emily Sargent Councilman

How easy it was that day to fall into my old, outgrown (I thought) trap of thinking that I had to be *the one* to "help"! Jerry, so young, intense and vulnerable, needed support from someone who cared.

We had met on Monday, the first session of the Personal Relationship Workshop in the Retreat. He was my partner in one of the exercises, and I knew at once, in spite of the decades between us, that we shared a mutual liking and respect. There was a glow of warmth, of energy between us. Looking into his eyes, I identified with him and with the me of long ago – shy, sensitive, hurting, wanting desperately to fulfill God's plan for life, yearning to help others, to understand them – and "pressing hard" on toward the mark. I knew where he was coming from. *Pressing hard.* I had been there – *still was,* more than I realized, as I was soon to discover the hard way.

On that last afternoon after workshop, we left the room together, walking on clouds – pink ones! – soaring with the oneness we had experienced in those final moments with the group which had become, during that short week of retreat, a totally loving, accepting community.

Outdoors he said, "Let me walk you to your dorm." And on the way he began at once to spill the overflow of his hopes and dreams, his frustrations and hurts and fears. I listened all the way to the dorm, putting into practise the week's learning experience. I resisted every impulse to interrupt with, "Yes, I know. . .Yes. . .Yes. . ." And it was more than a deliberate choice. Cherishing those moments of his giving, I was present with him. He could have been my own son. And I loved him.

As we reached the dorm, the depth of his yearning need showed through the strain in his voice. "I want to help others," he said, "but how can I if I don't understand them? I've just got to learn how to understand them. But it's hard. Somehow I miss out there a lot of the time. And then *they* don't understand, and that. . .hurts."

I knew how that hurt. And I couldn't let him go. "Let's sit down on the porch a minute, shall we?" I didn't realize then that my caring was laced with a dose of pity. I only knew that I wanted to help him over this rough spot, to give him what I had learned, only recently – fresh insight about acceptance of self and of others.

As we sat down I began, "Perhaps we can't ever really understand another fully – we have never walked in his moccasins. That could be an impossible demand we make on ourselves . . ."

"Oh, but I must," he broke in, his voice rising, his eyes almost tearful.

But I, unmindful, went on, "Maybe if we learn to accept the other person, wherever he may be, and see him, a child of God becoming himself at his own pace and in his own way – Acceptance, rather than understanding, is coming to be the bridge for me. And strangely enough, I'm finding that it leads to some measure of understanding when I do not demand it of myself. Does that make any sense?"

Jerry did not answer except with the pain in his eyes.

I was hurting too, feeling the disappointment of failure. I had not been able to be the one to help him.

Silently we stood up and began to move toward the doorway, and in those few steps, I turned my ankle and fell flat on my face. When Jerry helped me up I reassured him about the fall. We said our warm and loving, but subdued, goodbyes.

During that night, awake at times with the prodding of a swollen and inflamed ankle and my need for meditation and prayer, I came to myself. I had failed at the last because I had not responded to Jerry's need. My caring had slipped into that old ego-trip of pressing hard - *too hard* - of having to be *the one* to help. I had tried to "make it happen" instead of letting it happen in his own time, his own way. I was not content to answer simply Jerry's present need – someone to listen, to accept him, believing he would find his answers in his time within himself where God is. He was not ready for my particular solution – acceptance – which I was not even practising, myself, where he was concerned!

At home again, the sprained ankle gave me little trouble after that insight became a deeper part of my consciousness. Only an occasional twinge during the next week or two remainded me to practice, with God's help, what I had begun to learn about acceptance – acceptance of myself, imperfect and humble enough to learn from failure, knowing that God accepts me as I am; and acceptance of other persons with true caring, willing to "let it happen" for each of them, trusting in the all-powerful love of God within each one of His created children. And loving them, each one.

Jerry, invisible to me now across the unknown miles, I thank you for helping me to learn more about acceptance within God's plan for me in my relationship with others – and myself. Thank you for being yourself and for letting me share that brief touching of our lives at that growing-edge point. If we ever meet again, it will be beautiful. No matter. I see you now, wherever you may be, as whole in your becoming, surrounded by God's love and near to those others belonging to your divine plan. I see you loving, yearning, failing, hurting and learning – even as I – and at moments experiencing your own ecstasy beyond despair. I see you aware of God's presence within you and within all others touching you with readiness. All this I see and send to you across the unknown miles. And I send you my love.

News of the Fellowship

AFRICA REPORT

Reports are becoming more widely available throughout the religious and secular press of the gravity of the famine which is now occuring throughout most of Africa. According to recent reports in the *National Catholic Reporter* (May 4, 1984) between one hundred and one hundred and fifty million people are suffering. Predictions are that many millions of these people will die of starvation and disease in coming months, and that many millions more who survive will be permanently disabled by their ordeal. Assistance at all levels is urgently needed.

The following organizations have programs in place now. They can provide first hand information for those who request it, and are recommended to readers who feel moved and able to help:

Africare
1601 Conn. Ave NW
Wash., D.C. 20009

American Friends Service Comm.
1501 Cherry St.
Phila., Pa. 19012

CARE
660 First Ave.
NY, NY 10016

Catholic Relief Services
1011 First Ave.
NY, NY 10022

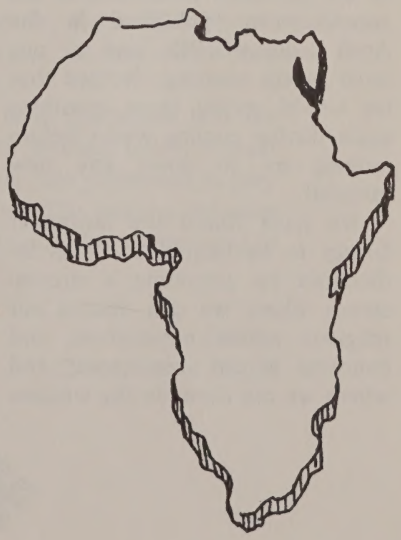
Church World Services
475 Riverside Dr.
NY, NY 10115

Lutheran World Relief
360 Park Ave. South
NY, NY 10010

Menonite Central Committee
21 S. 12th St.
Akron, Pa. 17501

Save the Children
54 Wilton Rd.
Westport, Conn. 06880

World Concern Development Organization
19303 Fremont Ave., No.
Seattle, Washington 98133



News of the Fellowship, continued

SURRENDER GROUP REPORT

The eight PM Thursday meetings of the Fellowship-sponsored Surrender Group at the Friend's Meetinghouse in Princeton will continue throughout the summer.

Meetings are open to anyone interested in the problems associated with self-centeredness, self-will, and egotism, and with considering the alternative of surrender. Meetings are free, though contributions are sometimes taken to cover the cost of refreshments and utilities. Further information and directions are available from the Fellowship's office.

Our group has considered each of the questions mentioned in the announcement published in the April issue of FIP, and at our most recent meeting, decided that we would review these questions again during coming weeks before moving on to cover any new material.

We have found the Surrender Group to be helpful to us as individuals by providing a circumstance where we can discuss our religious values, experiences, and concerns in our own words, and where we can draw on the wisdom and experiences of others whose lives and experiences have been, at least superficially, very different from our own.

We have noticed that, as a practical matter, we are a diverse group and it is wiser for us to avoid discussions of our particular political and theological beliefs. We have come to suspect that this would also be wise if specifically sexual concerns were raised, although this has not yet occured in any of our meetings.

We are finding that patience, and a willingness to observe a little prayerful silence rather than rushing to respond to one another seems to help us past our feelings of hollowness and triviality, and seems to lead us to a deepened sense of ourselves as human beings who want to be closer to the truth, to God, and to each other.

We cordially invite any of our readers who have the opportunity, to visit with us when they are in the Princeton area, and to share with us their experiences in the prayer, meditation, and other similar groups with which they work.

Concerning the Possession of Truth

I think there are some clues to what makes us willing to murder in the name of truth.

One is our desire to possess truth, rather than serve it. I am increasingly convinced that the need to be right has nothing whatsoever to do with the love of truth. But to face the implications of this means accepting a painful inner emptiness: I am not now what I sense, somehow, I am meant to be. I do not know what I feel from the bottom of my heart, I need to know. The beginning of wisdom is not to flee from this condition or distract yourself from it; it is essential not to fill it up with answers which have not been earned. It is important – even politically important, and it is essential spriritually – to learn how to wait, with empty hands. It is the desire to fill up that emptiness which leads to political or religious fanaticism. By possessing the truth (which is very different from being possessed by it) you anchor yourself – the big hollow winds, the self-doubts are silenced. It is the truths arrived at this way which men kill for.

I suppose at the practical level this means that the insights of monasticism and the mystical tradition must be seen as central to Christianity, not peripheral, as they are ordinarily understood to be. The primary religious question is not "What are we to do?" but "What am I to be?"

John Garvey
Commonweal 5/4/84

The Wealthy Life

by Brad Hill

I am in debt. So it is with a brief quickening of the pulse that my eye is caught by an advertisement in this morning's newspaper: "You Qualify for a Loan!" The headline is black, bold, urgent, proclamatory as gospel. However, the absurdity of borrowing in order to get out of debt catches up with me and I quickly abandon the idea, leaving myself to ponder with a cooler head this message with which my day has begun.

Naturally enough, I would always rather have than borrow. And at the same time, I would rather give than lend. This morning it occurs to me that these two preferences are like the two sides of a coin. If I am to be more generous – and there is room for it – then I must approach life with more gratitude, for a thankful receiver is an easy giver.

But being grateful, I am learning, is no less challenging than being generous. And living as we do in a society which emphasizes lending and repaying as a means of exchange – in which "You qualify for further debt" is a message of glad tidings – one's capacity for pure and simple gratitude can get a bit rusty.

I work at a cash register in a small restaurant. Several times a day I witness the short drama in which a customer is insisting on paying for a friend's lunch.

"Today is my treat."

"Oh, no, I can't let you do that."

"Yes, yes, I insist. Put your money away."

"Are you sure?"

"Absolutely."

"Well, all right; next time, lunch will be on me."

For most of us, this is a familiar dialogue. The promise of repayment is a common and gracious way of expressing our gratitude. But I can't help wondering if it is the most generous way. There is a reciprocative quality in a quicker, less artful style of thankfulness which is its own repayment.

This was brought home to me by a little girl I met last year. Our acquaintance was very brief, but timely. It was Christmas week, and I had just finished exchanging gifts with my co-workers at the restaurant. During this gathering, one young lady with whom I share a work shift surprised me with an especially beautiful and thoughtful present. The moment of unwrapping was delightful yet embarrassing, for I immediately thought that my gift to her seemed perfunctory and trivial by comparison. In voicing my thanks I was distracted by my own inner resolve to do better at the next gift-giving opportunity.

Later I stood by the library, munching on a granola bar. Beside me a pigtailed girl played on the steps. She soon spotted the food in my hand, and with the utter lack of self-consciousness which marks an eight-year-old she planted herself in front of me, gazed rapturously at the treat and declared,

"That looks yummy!" There was nothing to do but break off a piece for her. I held it out invitingly; she took it gleefully and directly, without resorting to the unnecessary use of her hands, licking my fingers clean.

To say she enjoyed it would be to understate her transport. She ran to her mother, who was now emerging from the library, with the news. "That man just gave me some of his cookie, and it was *so good*!" She continued her rhapsody, but I had already learned a lesson. Though my little friend offered me nothing in return, I felt amply and rewardingly thanked by her unaffected delight. Manners may change as a child becomes an adult, but this little girl had shown me clearly the essence of how to receive a gift.

It was a small demonstration of generosity on my part. As I recall it this early morning, my thoughts turn toward life's larger offerings. The unfolding day, the coming hour, the present moment – all ripe with potential, and irrevocably *ours.* They are owned, not borrowed, demanding nothing in return but to be taken and lived. This does not mean that I will refuse to take out loans, pay my utility bills or borrow a few dollars from a friend now and then. But the wealthy life is a thankful one, and the great gifts are those for which there can be no adequate repayment, except a full appreciation. So as I consider again the printed offer of yet another loan, I cast my lot with Shakespeare: "Oh Lord, that lends me life, lend me a heart replete with thankfulness."

What Is Primary Point?

by Zen Master Seung Sahn

When you have a scale and there is nothing being weighed, the indicator points to zero. You put something on it, and the pointer swings to "one pound." You take it off, the pointer goes back to zero. This is primary point. After you find your primary point, when good or bad feelings come, your pointer swings in one direction or another, but this doesn't matter. Don't check it. When the feeling is over with, the pointer swings back to zero.

If you haven't found your primary point, it's like taking a heavy object off the scale and having the pointer stay at "ten pounds." Or, the pointer moves back only part way, it doesn't go completely back to zero. Then your scale does not weigh correctly. If you put a heavy object on it, it may completely break.

So first you must find your primary point, and keep it very strongly. A taxi has good shock absorbers, so it's very steady. If you keep your primary point, your mind will become stronger. When you meet a big problem, your mind will move less and less, and soon return to primary point. Finally, your mind will be very strong, able to carry any load. Then saving all people is possible.

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The World Peace Prayer

The Prayer for Peace, in various languages, is said each day at noon by people of many different faiths, and forms a chain of peace and determined hope around the world. Further details from: PRAYER FOR PEACE, Seniors Farmhouse, Semley, Shaftesbury, Dorset SP7 9AX, England.

Q. When we suggest to people to Pray for Peace what do we mean by prayer?

A. In the Christian world, there seems to be the idea that when you are praying you are praying to some person, to the personalised God. You are praying to someone who is going to listen to you and maybe grant your prayer. If you pray hard enough and long enough your prayer will be answered by God. But in other religions, for instance among Hindus and Sufis and particularly Buddhists, there is no such idea of a personalised god. Here the meaning of prayer is actually to focus, to concentrate your total attention. Thus you are praying to yourself, within yourself and by yourself. In the Muslim tradition prayer and remembrance are the same thing. From this point of view, when we say the Peace Prayer we are remembering the state of the world and the importance of peace. By praying together everyday we are reminding ourselves and the world of the responsibility we have for things like atomic warfare and the arms race; we are remembering the value of peace. It is telling that the core meaning of the word remember is to be one with, to become again a member, a limb, a part of the whole. Seen in this light, prayer is not any longer exclusively a religious practice – it makes just as much sense to the humanist agnostic.

With Prayer for Peace we are using the word of prayer in the broadest possible way. In a sense we are praying to all human beings. We are praying to people who have compassion and love for the world and for nature. We are praying even to those who are perhaps, from our point of view, misguided. We are praying to one another and to ourselves, so that this planet earth survives and all humanity can live together. The Prayer for Peace is multi-religious and it is trans-religious and also it is beyond religious boundaries. I am a Hindu and you are a Christian and he is a Muslim, we have three compartments. But prayer is beyond these compartments. Even Humanism is another compartment. A free thinker, a liberal, a socialist, an activist, an agnostic, these are all compartments. One can be attached to these particular ideas in the same way as somebody can be attached to Christianity or Hinduism or Buddhism. So the Prayer for Peace is something 'non-aligned', it has the capacity to go beyond all compartments, beyond all divisions, beyond all narrow sectarian thinking. It draws on the force or principle that unites. And in doing so it states that no matter what we choose as our particular compartment the context is shared, is - if you like - global. The Prayer relates to this shared context. That is why it has the power to unite us.

From an interview on the World Peace Prayer project with Satish Kumar, the editor of Resurgence Magazine.

Lead me from Death to Life
From Falsehood to Truth

Lead me from Despair to Hope
From Fear to Trust

Lead me from Hate to Love
From War to Peace

Let Peace fill our Heart
Our World, Our Universe

Peace Peace Peace

Continued from page 2

Since coming to the Fellowship I have been led to see that the life of the Spirit proceeds in those around us in unexpected depth and in great profusion. All unnoticed, the faces that we see around us each day turn many times, in many ways, to God.

Making the effort to share the means by which we pray will require our humility. If given reverently, we have much that we can learn from one another and our personal acts of prayer can serve the Spirit in ways that we can not even imagine.

With James' advice in mind therefore, I would like to share with you a prayer practice that a friend mentioned to me recently. It is a practice of purification, and I will quote her as best I can:

> "Three quarters of the practical work of prayer is getting rid of the baggage I carry from the past. We need to be pure to be better channels for grace, so it can flow into us, and through us into the world."
>
> "Forgiving and being forgiven release the past and purify us so that we can be more receptive to the Spirit."
>
> "Every day at waking, and again just before sleep, I've been calling to mind a person who troubles me from my past. I imagine this person as clearly as I can, and then I say to them
>
> 'John, forgive me for what I've done to you.'
> and
> 'John, I forgive you for what you've done to me.' "
>
> "I've been reviewing my life this way. I've taken each of the people who've haunted me, and focused on them one at a time, spending up to fifteen days in succession on each of them. It's been very liberating, and many old wounds have begun to heal."
>
> "I always finish my devotions with a prayer that has become very precious to me. The one who taught it to me emphasized that the last words of the prayer 'quietly and quickly' were especially important, and that one should always remember to include them"

In the name of the Holy Spirit
I ask that Divine Order flow
through my life, my mind, my body,
  and my relationships
and heal what most needs to be healed
quietly and quickly.

E.M. (with special thanks
to Beth Linnerson)

RESOURCES:

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RESPITE

After not hearing the news for three days
With its poison dancing like an idiot in the air
Between the cloven hoof beats of commercials,
I dreamed I was young and climbing
The quiet little hills of yesterday.

William Walter De Bolt

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